

Overhauling the Comprehensive Exam in the Department of Linguistics: First Steps

Andrea Berez-Kroeker
Katie Drager
Bradley McDonnell

INTRO

- In the Linguistics PhD program, the Comprehensive Exam consists of two Qualifying Papers (QPs).
- The QPs aim to assess students' abilities in planning research projects, collecting and analyzing data, and writing results.
- However, the procedures for QPs have fallen out of step with current trends in the field.
- As a result, some students have been struggling to pass the Comprehensive Exam in a timely manner, and are underprepared to tackle the challenges of writing a dissertation.

GOAL

Reconfigure the Comprehensive Exam so that

- Faculty can better assess student progress, and
- The QPs better prepare students for dissertation writing.

METHODS

- Fall 2018: Formed Department Program Assessment Committee
- Phase 1: Overhaul of QP *procedure*
 - Clarify workflow for developing QP topic, collecting/analyzing data, and writing up
 - Completed January 2019
- Phase 2 (Fall 2020)
 - Reassess program SLOs and align with program stages
 - E.g., *What skills do we want students to have before they start the QPs? What skills do we want students to demonstrate in the QPs?*
 - Develop rubric for evaluating QP success
- Phase 3 (Spring 2020 - Fall 2021)
 - Test and edit QP evaluation rubric

RESULTS

Early results this semester show that students and committee members are pleased with the new clearer workflow and communication pathways.

Students have been successfully completing QPs more quickly than before, with far less anxiety and confusion.

By clarifying the **workflow** and **communication paths** for Qualifying Paper committees and students, we have increased the **efficiency of QP completion** and **reduced student anxiety and confusion.**

For a copy of this poster
and our revised QP procedures:



SUMMARY OF CHANGES IN QP PROCEDURES

The configuration of the committee has changed.

- Before: 1 chair + 2 equally-ranked members
- After: 1 chair + 2 readers. Chair has highest authority (akin to a journal editor), Reader 1 serves as reviewer, Reader 2 settles disputes, if relevant.

The publication requirement has changed.

- Before: QP required to be published to pass.
- After: QP not required to be published, but must be written with a publication venue in mind. QP will pass when it is deemed "ready to submit" to that venue.

A written Plan of Work is now required.

- Student and chair must file a Plan of Work detailing a meeting schedule, a writing schedule, an outline, a maximum paper length, and any other details desired by the chair.

Path of communication between committee members has been clarified.

- Before: Student sent paper drafts directly to committee members; how feedback was provided varied across chairs and students.
- After: Chair sends draft to Reader 1, and then presents Reader's comments to student in a format much like an editorial reply.

Procedure for managing revisions has been clarified.

- Before: Students replied separately to each member's request for revisions, often resulting in a disjointed paper.
- After: The Chair and Reader decide together which revisions are necessary and which are not, creating a unified list of feedback for the student to respond to.

Committee members' relative power to pass or fail a QP has been clarified.

- Before: No established procedure.
- After: Clear options for "Approve," "Approve with Minor Revisions," "Revise and Resubmit" (with guidelines for communicating revisions to student), and "Fail".